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SUBJECT: SUDANESE WOMEN SET AGENDA FOR PEACE IN DARFUR

SUMMARY

¶1. (U) The second African Women's Consultation on Darfur took place in Addis Ababa from January 5-7, 2009. The conference was organized by Femmes Africa Solidarite (FAS), supported by the UK Department for International Development (DfID) and the Norwegian Government, and led by former President of Ireland and UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Mary Robinson. More than 150 Sudanese women and international participants were in attendance, including approximately 60 Darfuri political and civil society leaders from the Sudanese Women's Forum on Darfur. The Forum was established during the first African Women's Consultation on Darfur, which was held in Addis in January 2008. USAID/OTI's FSN participated in the first consultation, served on the forum's interim steering committee in 2008, and attended the most recent meeting. Participants agreed that international delegates must lobby the leaders of rebel groups in 2009 in order for the initiative's bottom-up efforts to build momentum for a genuine peace process to be effective. End summary.

ENGENDERING THE PEACE PROCESS IN DARFUR

¶2. (U) The FAS initiative aims to advance the Darfur peace process by: consolidating the peace agenda through a consultative process; strengthening the capacity of Sudanese women to mobilize actors and engage in advocacy; building support for the women's peace agenda among Sudanese parties to the conflict and the international community; and facilitating the participation of Sudanese women in future peace negotiations.

¶3. (U) Recognizing that one of the reasons women are poorly represented in peace negotiations is because they lack the capacity for effective participation, the FAS initiative conducted a series of capacity-building efforts for Sudanese women leaders in 2008, including a training on UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and key UN conventions. Advocacy efforts also enabled members of the Sudanese Women's Forum to take part in key regional and international fora, such as the 7th Session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva in March, 2008. During two solidarity missions to Sudan last year, international delegates assessed training needs, mapped women's organizations and established a functioning secretariat for the Forum.

¶4. (U) The Sudanese Women's Forum is working to coordinate action in Sudan linked to a Darfur peace process; facilitate dialogue between various actors; and report to the joint United Nations - African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) and other relevant institutions on issues of concern for women in Darfur. In 2008, members of the Forum reached out to women on the ground in each of the Darfur states. Darfuri women welcomed the initiative and discussions with women and local leaders in camps for internally

displaced persons (IDPs) revealed an eagerness on the part of displaced communities to voice their concerns to the parties of the conflict.

2009 AGENDA FOR PEACE

15. (U) For the coming year, participants of the second African Women's Consultation on Darfur agreed to continue advocacy work at the local, regional and international levels, as well as capacity building efforts to effectively mobilize Sudanese women for peace. International delegates of the FAS initiative will assume responsibility for increasing contact with the leadership of Darfur's rebel groups in 2009.

16. (U) Awareness-raising activities addressing issues such as violence against women and land rights will continue to be held at the Pan-African level, as well as in Khartoum, El Fasher, Geneina and Nyala. In addition, advocacy efforts are planned for upcoming international fora in New York and Geneva. Preparations will also be undertaken in the event that a women's delegation will be able to participate in peace negotiations. For example, representatives of the Sudanese Women's Forum will have the opportunity to take part in coaching sessions that enable them to more effectively participate in such negotiations.

INCLUSIVITY: A STRENGTH AND A WEAKNESS

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17. (U) The greatest challenge facing the Sudanese Women's Forum on Darfur appears to be internal, i.e. originating from its commitment to consolidate the Darfur peace agenda through an inclusive consultation process. With representatives from the Sudanese government, non-signatories and civil society all participating in the Forum, consensus is rare. In its annual report, the Khartoum Chapter of the Forum noted that a lack of trust continues to permeate meetings. Disputes between the Forum's diverse members are common, in particular with those who are also members of the Sudanese Women's General Union. (Note: The Union is the women's wing of the ruling National Congress Party and its leadership believes all activities related to women should fall under its umbrella. End Note.)

18. (SBU) The Sudanese government's response to the FAS initiative has typically been characterized by suspicion. In South Darfur, in particular, government authorities from the Sudanese National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS) repeatedly obstructed the Forum's activities. In March 2008, two of the Forum's members were detained by NISS office in Nyala for a total of 12 hours over a two-day period, based on allegations that they had received the equivalent of \$75,000 from the Darfur-Darfur Dialogue and Consultation (DDDC) to mobilize IDPs to obstruct the population census. In reality, the group had received \$10,000 from UNAMID-Civil Affairs to conduct outreach activities on the peace process with women in IDP and host communities. (Note: Examples of continued obstruction by the regime are troubling, but the fact that participants were able to travel to Addis and other activities have gone forward - and that other conferences organized by the DDDC are also occurring on a regular basis in Darfur - shows some limited progress on the part of the regime. End note.)

19. (SBU) Participants traveling to the conference from West and South Darfur states faced harassment from NISS. In Geneina, fifteen women and one man were arrested at the airport and detained for eight hours before being released. Despite delays and obstacles, all invitees were able to reach the conference in Addis, providing participants with optimism that progress - however slow - can still be made.

COMMENT

¶10. (SBU) Success of the initiative's bottom-up efforts to build momentum for a genuine peace process will largely be contingent on the international delegates' ability to effectively lobby the leaders of the rebel groups in 2009. With a likely ICC indictment pending against the Sudanese President, there is currently little incentive for the rebel groups to engage in a meaningful peace process with the Government of Sudan (GoS). However, UNAMID has repeatedly expressed both its interest and support for the Forum's activities and the input that the Forum can provide to both UNAMID Civil Affairs and the DDDC is valuable and may be used to inform the contents of a political solution to the Darfur crisis when negotiations finally begin in earnest.

FERNANDEZ